

# Department of Human Services

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NEWS BULLETIN

## Tim Holland gives up rights to Ricky's siblings

*December 18, 2006*

*By JACK KRESNAK*

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

LANSING — The father of Ricky Holland voluntarily surrendered his parental rights to Ricky's four siblings this morning and an Ingham County family court judge will decide this afternoon whether to terminate their mother's rights.

Tim Holland, 37, is serving 30-60 years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in the death of 7-year-old Ricky in 2005. Lisa Holland, 33, was convicted by a jury of first-degree murder and first-degree child abuse in Ricky's death and is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Both were in the courtroom today.

The Hollands adopted Ricky and his three biological siblings — a boy now almost 5, a 4-year-old girl and a 3-year-old boy — through the Jackson County Family Court. The Hollands also had a biological daughter, now 2. All of the children are being cared for by two of Tim Holland's sisters.

Assistant Ingham County Prosecutor James Pettibone argued today that, because Lisa Holland was convicted of murdering Ricky, there were several grounds to terminate her parental rights to the children, including that she is unable to provide a home for them. Ingham Family Court Judge Janelle Lawless said she would announce her decision at 3 p.m. today.

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## Plans to Finally Lay Ricky Holland to Rest

Dec 16, 2006 08:22 AM EST

Plans are nearly complete to finally lay Ricky Holland to rest. The murdered boys' burial has been delayed for nearly a year while his mother Lisa Holland stood trial for his murder.

Now with both his parents behind bars, the Ingham County Prosecutors Office says they can get ready to move ahead with closure for Ricky. They say many people have called in and made donations to make sure Ricky gets a proper funeral service.

Stuart J. Dunnings III, Ingham County Prosecutor: "I have a funeral home that's offered their services and I have a cemetery that's offered what we need for an above-ground encryption."

Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III says the only thing they're waiting on is a court proceeding deciding who gets final custody of Ricky's body.



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## State failed Ricky

Sunday, December 17, 2006

Two things are clear in the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland: His adoptive parents Tim and Lisa Holland killed him and the state of Michigan failed him.

The latter was made abundantly clear in reports issued Dec. 8 by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman and the state Department of Human Services. They described numerous mistakes and procedures that were violated by state social workers in handling abuse claims against Ricky. The reports raise serious questions about how well-served the public is by the Jackson County DHS office. Those questions must be answered before credibility can be restored.

The boy whose death has riveted the state for more than a year lived in Jackson until April 2005. His adoptive mother was found guilty of killing him three months after the family moved to Williamston.

The reports found that 10 current DHS employees in Jackson and Ingham counties failed to investigate abuse complaints and overly trusted the Hollands. Evidence of that is obvious. In July 2005, when the Hollands reported Ricky missing and hundreds of Lansing-area residents were combing neighborhoods in search of him, a Jackson County social worker allowed the Hollands to adopt another of Ricky's siblings.

How did that happen? It's almost unbelievable. Given what we know now, the Hollands were allowed to adopt another child after killing Ricky and dumping his body in a rural Ingham County swamp. Question for DHS: Why are the people who allowed this to happen still working at the agency?

All 10 current employees are under investigation and no timetable is set for completing that internal inquiry, DHS Director Marianne Udow said. Nine of those employees have been temporarily placed in other jobs that don't involve directly overseeing child welfare cases. We wonder why it has taken more time to investigate these employees than it did for the state to investigate, try and convict the Hollands. This is not acceptable; in fact, it sounds like foot-dragging. And it certainly is no assurance to the people of Jackson that the appropriate action has been taken.

Four complaints were filed in Jackson County. The first three had nothing to do with Ricky, but the fourth came from a therapist who noticed burn marks on Ricky's wrist. In 2002, Ricky told the Catholic Social Services therapist his parents tied him up in bed at night and that Tim Holland handcuffed him.

But the state failed to properly investigate these complaints. There's some evidence that this may have been because the Hollands were in good standing with the Jackson DHS office. Tim Holland was a former Friend of the Court bench warrant officer, perhaps another reason why DHS workers were willing to give the couple the benefit of the doubt.

The DHS report recommends abuse investigations be conducted by a different county's staff to ensure "objectivity." It's obvious the Jackson workers overly trusted the Hollands. But how does shifting investigations to another office solve the problems at the Jackson office? If the Jackson office can't be trusted to conduct an investigation, then personnel there should be changed. Also, in investigating abuse complaints, it seems to us that more credibility should be lent to folks who deal directly with the child and family every day, rather than the bimonthly contacts the law now requires.

Mistakes were made. Problems were ignored, despite commendable efforts by the first therapist in 2002 and Jackson Public Schools in 2005. The

Hollands pulled Ricky out of Cascades under pressure from officials at JPS.

It is not enough for reports to be issued and DHS to tell us how devastated employees are. There must be accountability. During her campaign, Gov. Jennifer Granholm assured the public that the appropriate

people had been reprimanded and fired in the Holland case, but we see no evidence of that in Jackson County.

A child died under the watch of almost a dozen case workers. It was their responsibility to ensure his safety and welfare. Now it is the responsibility of Gov. Granholm and the DHS to make sure that forceful and real action is taken against those who made serious mistakes, and that the Jackson office has competent leadership and employees. Until then, the department's credibility will continue to dwindle.

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Article published Dec 17, 2006

## David Law: We must protect children

BY LARRY RUEHLEN  
STAFF WRITER

State Rep. David Law has seen too many photos of dead children. The images won't go away but perhaps that's a good thing.

"It just makes me sick to think of what people can do to a child," he said. "In some cases, our system is overworked. In others, and the Ricky Holland case is a prime example, there was information that wasn't acted upon. That's incompetence or laziness that we can't tolerate."

Ricky Holland was 7 when his adoptive mother Lisa Holland killed him with a hammer in June. A subsequent investigation revealed several mistakes in the way the state's Department of Human Services handled the case.

"Ricky was going to school with bruises," said Law. "Things weren't reported. The only reason we found out is because Ricky was killed. How many other children out there are being abused that we don't know about? It makes you wonder."

Law, a former Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor, worked on child abuse cases before getting elected. Given his background, fellow legislators agreed to have him chair recent hearings of the House Special Committee on Child Protection. The intent was to find out what was wrong with the state's child protection system.

Funding is a problem, said Law, but throwing millions of dollars at it isn't the only answer. Better training, improved accountability and impartial oversight of case management are also needed, he said.

With that in mind, he sponsored House Bill 6440, which would, if signed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, allow the office of the children's ombudsman to operate independently of the Department of Human Services. The house and senate passed the bill and it now goes to Granholm.

"We don't support this legislation because it is completely unnecessary," said Liz Boyd, spokesperson for Granholm. "I don't know whether the governor will sign it. The fact is that the legislature already has oversight. We think the current system is working fine."

Currently, the governor-appointed ombudsman who investigates the death of a child is under the auspices of the very department she is charged to oversee. It's similar to an internal affairs police officer being responsible for weeding out bad cops.

Law's bill goes a step further by placing the ombudsman under the control and supervision of the Legislative Council. It would give legislators direct supervisory powers over the department.

"This is something that should have happened 10 years ago under Gov. (John) Engler" said Law. "But he didn't want to give up control. This isn't a political issue. It's something that must be done."

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Published: December 17, 2006 3:00AM

**DETROIT FREE PRESS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

## **Protect children**

I have read all your coverage on the Ricky Holland case with a sickened and heavy heart, and none more so than after reading the findings of the Department of Human Services probe ("Ricky probe faults state workers," Dec. 9). Whereas I do agree that the ultimate blame for Ricky's murder lies with his adoptive parents, I still feel the system failed this poor child.

The DHS announced key changes to the system, and I hope they will be followed through by caseworkers. If the system is not changed, how many more children will die before something is done to protect these children, who through no fault of their own have been placed into this flawed system?

Cheri Evancho  
Sterling Heights

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Published December 16, 2006  
[ From Lansing State Journal ]

Saturday's letters to the editor

## **A legacy for Ricky**

Insanity includes doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. In the wake of the Ricky Holland case, Michigan should consider a bold approach.

It took cops to find Ricky's killers. Why not hire cops to find other children at risk of murder?

Why should social workers investigate abuse and neglect? Let social workers do social work. Abuse and neglect are crimes. Hire experienced police officers as investigators and managers within the Department of Human Services.

Recent reforms added 51 caseworkers, which only reduce per caseworker investigations by 1.36 and foster care oversight by .22. Imagine the potential if 51 experienced police officers had been hired.

Lynne Martinez and Maxine Thome say training is key. They encourage frontline education of caseworkers from police officers and prosecutors. Why not hire the real thing and save the lives of children?

Stephanie Whitbeck

Lansing

# Niles Daily Star

## ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

### Making a safe haven

By ANDY HAMILTON / Niles Daily Star  
Friday, December 15, 2006 10:37 AM EST

NILES - The only way he would talk was with a blanket draped over his head.

It was the only method that made him feel comfortable enough to disclose the painful events of being sexually abused. But, he was talking, and that was the important thing.

"You know what? If they want to stand on their heads and talk, that's fine with me," said Barbara Welke, director and forensic interviewer for The Children's Assessment Center of Berrien County.

The center offers a safe, comfortable place for sexually abused children to relay their stories to prosecutors, police officers and Child Protective Services - people who can legally hold accountable those responsible for their crimes against the child. Plus, bringing those investigative organizations together at the same time means the child only has to tell the story once - aside from the required testimony in court - instead of painfully repeating it through each phase of prosecution.

The center - formerly a one-room schoolhouse - sits outside St. Joseph, surrounded by farmland and vineyards. The doors are always locked, and anyone entering is first seen on the front surveillance system camera.

The inside is painted in "neutral and soothing" colors of baby blue and grey. On the walls hang images from "Where the Wild Things Are," and also a brightly colored quilt with tiny sewn shapes of children's hands crafted by one of the county's prosecutors.

"We wanted to make a place where you were 15 and comfortable walking through the door, or 4," Welke said.

On staff at the center are Welke; Executive Director of the Center's parent agency, The Berrien County Council for Children, Tia Miller; a therapist, Lee Gallay; part-time therapist and forensic interviewer, Sue Bartholomew; family advocate Jaime Faith; and office administrator Karrie Turner. Providing educational seminars around the county is Lito Ramirez.

The multi-disciplinary team consists of a uniformed police officer investigating the case, a Child Protective Services worker, a county prosecutor and the forensic interviewer. The therapist and caregiver, parent or guardian become part of the team later.

The forensic interview, Welke said, is designed to elicit facts about the child's experience, "but to do it in a way that's neutral and non-leading." The child's story is critical for prosecution because physical abuse is only apparent in 5 to 15 percent of sexual abuse cases, Welke said.

"So that makes it critical that a child is able to provide reliable, meaningful statements about their experience," she added.

The center has two interview rooms, both of which have a camera and a one-way mirror. The child and the forensic interviewer - and only those two - sit in the interview room, and the remaining members of the multi-disciplinary team observe from the other side of the mirror.

The interviewer also wears a wireless earpiece that allows team members to ask questions. Sometimes, Welke said, the interviewer may miss getting a piece of information from the child that is vital for the prosecutor and officer to know for the case.

The process is guided by a nine-phase protocol adopted in Michigan and across the country, Welke said. She also said there have never been issues raised about non-objective interviewing at the center, which is one of 19 of its kind in the state.

"By following that protocol, we can say that child was interviewed just the same as the other 1,500 children," Welke said. "I think that's one of the beauties of videotape. I think they can see that really in a neutral, non-leading interview."

Only two copies of each interview exist - one goes with the prosecutor and the other with the officer or to Child Protective Services, and the defense attorney is allowed to view it, but not keep it. And, never does a copy stay at the center, Welke said.

"The prosecutors in the county are wonderful to work with on these cases," Welke said. "I'm sure in this county, we pursue cases they wouldn't in other counties."

The Center has worked with 16 prosecutors and 19 law agencies within Berrien County to perform 1,500 forensic interviews, 37 percent of which were south county cases. More than half of the referrals in 2006 came from Child Protective Services, and 260 of those referrals were for sexually abused children.

Other reasons for interviews in 2006 were physical abuse (34), neglect (5) and witness to violence (11). The majority of the 310 children interviewed this year were between the ages of 5 and 9 (124). Nearly 200 of those were Caucasian, 79 were African American and 17 were Hispanic.

A non-parent or non-caregiver was responsible for 32 percent of the cases handled at the center in 2006. An "other known person" was the perpetrator in 39 percent of the incidents, 18 percent of the time the violator was a parent or step-parent, and the caregiver or boyfriend or girlfriend were responsible 11 percent of the time.

Welke said she too is affected by many of the interviews, though obviously not the same as the children. And, she added, it's actually easier to be the interviewer than to view from behind the mirror.

"When I'm in the room, I'm OK and thinking about the next question; I'm involved sort of in the structure of the interview," Welke said. "To hear the story and the pain, that's a lot harder."

Welke also said many of the officers have admitted feeling the pain of observing a child recount the tale of being sexually abused. Many of them, she said, have told her they "would rather go into a bar and break up a drunken brawl."

The process after the interviewer begins by engaging the caregiver along with the rest of the multi-disciplinary team. Then, the child begins therapy sessions with Lee Gallay.

Each child that meets with Gallay also has the opportunity to become a part of the Worry Wall, a heart-wrenching list of fears no young person should have knowledge of. The Worry Wall is the places for victims to list their deepest fears, and also see that other children their age are experiencing the same feelings.

The fears are written on colored note cards. The worse the fear, the higher it goes on the Worry Wall.

The counseling lasts anywhere from three to eight months, Welke said. The communication is maintained at least until the case goes to trial, which Welke said can be a long, grueling process for a child.

The center is completely funded through grants, donations and fundraising events. The main source of money is the Victim's Of Crime Grant, which is generated from fines accessed in criminal court.

To make a donation to the Berrien County Council for Children and the Children's Assessment Center, call (269) 556-9640.



## Burton detective honored for service

### BURTON

#### THE BURTON NEWS

Sunday, December 17, 2006

By Elizabeth Lowe

[elowe@theburtonnews.com](mailto:elowe@theburtonnews.com) • 810.766.6281

BURTON - Burton police Detective Matt Bade has been key in changing the way sexual abuse cases are handled in Genesee County, local child advocacy experts say.

Bade was one of four Genesee County officers lauded recently for his involvement with the Child Advocacy Center of Flint's multi-disciplinary team. The recognition came during last month's second annual Stars for Children dinner and awards program at Genesys Conference and Banquet Center.

Circuit Judge Judith A. Fullerton recognized Bade and Flint police Lt. Tim Johnson and Detectives Diana Milles of Mt. Morris police and Jim Santa of Flint Township police for "always (being) the first to volunteer their time, experience and expertise."

Based on guidelines from the state Family Independence Agency, a formal multi-disciplinary team was created and implemented at the Child Advocacy Center.

The team includes representatives from law enforcement, the state Department of Human Services, medical and mental health specialists and a nationally trained forensic interviewer.

"This collaboration is the backbone of the Child Advocacy Center," said Fullerton, "and the reason we are able to be effective in our 'one child, one time, one place,' approach to forensic interviewing."

Each interview is recorded and broadcast via closed-circuit television to team members upstairs, who can direct the interviewer to ask questions through a hidden earpiece.

Team members then decide together whether abuse has occurred, then exchange copies of department paperwork on the spot.

The center becomes more than a neutral meeting place, and center workers become an advocate for the child, said Deborah Pascoe, director of the Child Advocacy Center in Flint.

A medical exam is scheduled and therapy arranged for the child and other family members. The center also tracks a child's case until it's resolved.

The team method has several advantages over previous case handling, Bade and Pascoe said. For one thing, the child isn't subjected to repeatedly reliving the abuse during multiple interviews.

The forensic interview is also aimed at accuracy through non-leading questions.

"If they're not interviewed correctly there's a real danger. Little kids like to please adults," said Bade, who added that the children might unintentionally lie based on cues from an adult. Older children sometimes also lie when they're unhappy with a parent.

The team approach is speedier, too. Previous delays meant the possibility of a family moving away before a child could be medically examined, said Pascoe, and coordinating paperwork could take months.

"Now they share reports right here and the case can go to the prosecutor within days," Pascoe said.

Training has been a crucial part of improving investigations in Genesee County.

In June 2005, Bade brought in author Kenneth Lanning, an expert in child sexual abuse investigations, for a training session that drew 250 participants.

Bade has been a forerunner in helping train members of agencies around the county, said Pascoe. Persuading others to accept help hasn't been smooth sailing.

"It's a leap of faith for investigators to put their trust in someone else to do a forensic interview which is so vitally important to these investigations," said Bade.

Sharing information with other agencies also is difficult for investigators who are used to working solo, or whose ego takes a battering when admitting someone else has more expertise. In some cases, the independence means sloppy casework, said Pascoe.

The center isn't a watchdog - that's an ombudsman's role - but Pascoe says she's determined not to fail any one of the nearly 1,000 children for whom the center has become an advocate since opening full time last year.

Without therapy, those children usually go on to victimize other children, she noted.

"People in the field say 'You have to let that one go,' " said Pascoe. "Well, no we don't. It's not OK to ever let one go."

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# Giving Troubled Families a Say in Child Welfare

By [LYNETTE CLEMETSON](#)  
The New York Times

Published: December 16, 2006

McMINNVILLE, Tenn. — In an effort to correct dysfunctional foster care systems, a growing number of child welfare agencies around the country are reaching outside their ranks to involve troubled families and the people in their lives in wrenching decisions about where endangered children should live.



Jamie Rose for The New York Times

Social workers from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services are part of the team approach to resolving Misty's child welfare case.

Some agencies find that by enlisting help from grandparents, church members, school counselors and sports coaches, they can reach faster, safer and more lasting decisions that result in fewer children languishing in foster care. Under the practice, known as team decision making, a group is assembled within 24 to 48 hours after a state agency is called into a crisis situation.

Programs exist in at least 21 states. Indiana, Michigan and Tennessee have adopted the team-approach statewide, while other programs are run at the county level. Officials in Denver County, Colo., credit the team approach for a 32 percent drop in out-of-home placements since 2002. In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, the program has reduced the number of children in foster care by more than half since 2001. Tennessee has reduced the number of children in state care by more than 1,000 since March 2004, when there were 10,600 in the system.

Methods differ, but the philosophy is the same: that even families under scrutiny from state agencies can help make positive decisions for their children.

Some advocates for children say the strategy gives negligent parents too much sway. But many child welfare officials believe the team process works.

Historically, “agencies called all the shots and told families everything that was wrong with them,” said Viola P. Miller, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, who instituted her state’s new model.

“But kids don’t exist in isolation,” Ms. Miller said. “If we are really going to keep families safe, we need to do that in the context of communities and family.”

In this rural outpost between Nashville and Knoxville, 12 people gathered recently to decide whether Misty N., a 26-year-old single mother of four, whose children were taken into state custody last February, deserved to get them back.

“Let’s start by acknowledging Misty’s strengths,” said Carrie McCrary, a group facilitator with the state, welcoming “Misty’s team.” The group included Misty, her mother, the children’s court-appointed guardian, a local Head Start coordinator, her older children’s school psychologist and several social workers. One by one they offered affirmations.

Misty (who asked that her family members’ last names be withheld to protect their privacy) had moved from a homeless shelter into a two-bedroom trailer with her mother. Though Misty has mild retardation, she was absorbing newly learned parenting skills, yelling at her children less and offering more positive reinforcement. She was also providing nutritious food during visits with her children.

And it was clear, everyone agreed, that she loved her children: Ramon, 6; Domiann, 5; Roberto, 4, and Pedro, 2.

“We need to talk about the sex offenders,” Rachel Kirby, the children’s court-appointed guardian, said, shattering the mood.

Misty had been living with a sex offender when her children were taken away. She had a brief involvement with another.

“We just need to be clear,” Ms. Kirby said to Misty. “When you’re standing in court, if there is a sexual offender in the home, that throws all the other good work out the window.”

Around the country, where similar strategies are in place, a group can meet for as long as two years, helping social workers assess whether families can be reunited or whether children should be moved toward adoption or legal guardianship, with relatives or an outside family. Groups sometimes continue to meet after a placement to monitor children's progress.

Child welfare agencies maintain ultimate power of approval, but deference is given to the collective wisdom and recommendation of the team.

No comprehensive long-term studies have been conducted to assess whether the team approach reduces incidents of child abuse. But in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, which instituted its program in 1994, Jim McCafferty, director of the county's Department of Children and Family Services, credits team meetings with helping reduce the number of children in the system to 2,702 this month from 6,237 in 2001, when the county's largest city, Cleveland, was rebounding from a crack epidemic. The number of children re-entering the system within 18 months dropped to 9 percent in 2004 from 16 percent in 1996.

Roxane White, manager of the Denver Department of Human Services, said that in addition to reducing out-of-home placements, team meetings had reduced incidents of new abuse to just over 2.6 percent from 6 percent in 2002.

But some advocates for children say the team system may be keeping children with parents when they would benefit more from foster care.

"The pendulum may have swung too much in the opposite direction," said Cyndy Bailes, executive director of CASA of the Tennessee Heartland, part of a national group of court-appointed special advocates for children.

Ms. Bailes's organization works in five counties in East Tennessee. She says her volunteers have complained that the team system there is poorly organized, that families do not cooperate and that participants have felt pressured by the Department of Children's Services to support family reunification over foster care or termination of parental rights.

Some social workers disagree.

“I have really bought into it, because it is not so much about blaming, so there is less resentment all around,” said Ms. McCrary of Children’s Services.

Cheryl McGuire, the caseworker who leads Misty’s team, said the system relieved pressure on overworked case managers. Misty and her mother, Geraldine, have seen the change in the system, they said, from the inside out.

Geraldine took Misty in as a foster child when she was 5 weeks old. Geraldine, who tacked down beltloops in a garment factory, and her husband adopted Misty and her older brother, Chris, when they were 2 and 3 years old.

After Geraldine’s husband died in 1983, she was unable to cope. Misty and Chris went back into state care.

Now Misty’s four children are in the system. Of the three known fathers, only one has been tangentially involved. It was Geraldine who called Children’s Services in February, because Misty, she said, “was running wild.”

At 64, Geraldine said, she was too old to care for the children on her own.

“It scares me half to death to think that she might not get her kids back,” said Geraldine, who is now retired. “But at the time it was best for the children. I hoped it would straighten her out.”

Geraldine said the team approach offered families more support than in years past when decisions were made by a single caseworker.

“When I was a foster parent, they just dropped off the kids and came back once a month to make sure they were clothed and fed,” she said.

Misty, too, said the experience differed from her past memories.

“It ain’t the first time I’ve been in here,” she said, referring to the county office of the Department of Children’s Services. “But this way here, it’s helping me more. Helping me to get my kids back.”

Teams around the country adhere to tight timelines for determining permanent placements, typically within a year or two.

Placements with relatives are preferred, but sometimes so-called kinship placements are not with biological relatives, but with people whom the child considers family.

In Rutherford County, southeast of Nashville, a 13-year-old girl was recently placed in foster care after her mother's suicide. She responded poorly, acting out and wetting her bed. She asked to be with her mother's boyfriend's mother, whom she called Granny. The girl's participation in the team resulted in her adoption, last month, by her grandmother figure.

With no similar possibilities for Misty's children, the stakes of her team's decision are higher. By the one-year mark in February they must recommend reunification or make the children available for adoption.

The children are in a rare situation in which the foster parents, a stable family in a nearby town, have agreed to keep all four long term.

Misty and Geraldine are living on Geraldine's \$789-a-month Social Security check, plus food stamps. Where would the children sleep in the two-bedroom mobile home and could the women's limited resources provide for them? asked Ms. McGuire, the team leader, in the hour-and-a-half meeting on Misty's case.

"It don't leave a lot of room for extras, but it can sustain us," Geraldine said, adding that they would get extra food stamps with the children.

The discussion turned to the children.

Roberto has continuing problems with aggression. Domiann, one person suggested, had taken on a "dominant mother role" among the sibling group. Pedro, someone mentioned, might suffer from an attachment disorder. Ramon, participants observed, has been gorging during visits with his mother, a nervous behavior he does not engage in at his foster home.

Next, the group laid out goals for Misty to reach before February: She must have a psychological evaluation and continue training with social workers. She must stop associating with criminals.

After she and Geraldine left the room, the team members discussed the weight of the decision yet to come.

“The tough fact is that she may do everything we tell her to,” Ms. Kirby said. “She may work as hard as she can, and still not be able to get her children back.”



## Foster care'graduate'enjoying fatherhood

Monday, December 18, 2006

**ERIN ALBERTY**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

The road to independence is long, but the trip goes faster with an old Ford Tempo.

That's just one of the lessons 20-year-old Brandon J. Seder has learned since The Saginaw News last visited with the former foster child in May, when he was reveling in new fatherhood -- baby Skye was born in April -- and new wire-framed glasses, which he paid for himself.

Both events were milestones into adulthood for the Freeland man, who has experienced jail time, homelessness and hunger since he aged out of foster care about three years ago.

Brandon was one of six former Saginaw County foster children who shared their stories with The Saginaw News for a look at life after state care.

Seder's primary role now is as a parent. He stays home with Skye while his wife, Johanna, works as a custodian at Saginaw Valley State University.

He breathlessly recites details of the 8-month-old's development: "She's starting to stand up, and she'll be walking soon. She's very fast when she crawls, and she's got two bottom teeth in now. She's starting to get the top ones, so she's going to look like a rabbit. She says a lot of words, like baba for bottle, and she's using some sign language -- like, she'll smack her cheek if her teeth are hurting."

After appearing in The Saginaw News, Seder and his family received several cash donations, including a check he couldn't cash because he had no ID. The county connected him with a mentor who helped him get a driver's license.

"A driver's license is a thing you have to have," Seder says.

Things went well for a while. Preliminary tests showed he could bypass some of the classes he'd need for his General Educational Development certificate. He was set to enroll in classes at the Education Training Center on Johnson in Saginaw when his Buick broke down.

"It was really hectic (for Johanna) getting back and forth to work," he says. Classes went by the wayside.

Now things are looking up, he says. A family friend sold him an old Ford Tempo for \$100. He plans to start classes this term.

"Once I have transportation, it should be easier," he says.

For now, he and Johanna are staying at her family's home and looking forward to the day they can get their own place.

It might be a matter of baby steps, he concedes. v

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

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## ER area on foster home 'wish list'

EATON COUNTY — Persons who contact the Eaton County Dept. of Human Services (DHS) to inquire about fostering a child are now being sent a revised 'wish list' — the priorities in the area for where foster children would most beneficially be placed.

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As the statewide Family-to-Family (F2F) initiative is being rolled out, DHS is being asked to focus foster home recruitment efforts on the communities and school districts where children are coming from. The idea is to keep children in schools and near relatives that can serve as a support and stabilizing influence when removal from their home of birth is ordered by the court. The F2F initiative also emphasizes keeping siblings together, which has been proven to be of utmost importance in helping foster children succeed.

As a result of this new focus, the DHS information packet sent to inquirers now emphasizes the need in Eaton County for foster homes in Eaton Rapids and Lansing addresses within Eaton County. Eaton Rapids School District is specifically mentioned.

DHS currently has only five licensed foster homes in this area. Many more are needed to allow for a good match between foster children and the foster family.

Other communities needing foster homes to keep kids near their support systems include Dimondale, Grand Ledge, Olivet, Pottersville, and Vermontville.

In addition to needing homes in the above mentioned communities, homes are especially needed anywhere in Eaton County to take even one teen or to keep a group of siblings together.

To learn more about foster care in our area, contact DHS and ask for the foster care information packet: [Mueller-HayesJ@michigan.gov](mailto:Mueller-HayesJ@michigan.gov) or by phone at (517) 543-5844.

— *From DHS, Foster Care Recruitment*

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## Cynthia Lucas: Mom to many

**Southfield woman opens her heart to dozens of neglected kids. On Mother's Day, they have reason to honor the woman who gave them a home -- and a chance**

**By CASSANDRA SPRATLING**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*December 17, 2006*

*Originally published May 14, 2006*

Wednesday was one of Cynthia Lucas' busy cooking days. Two of her six daughters wanted collard greens, but her husband, Alphonse Lucas, and another daughter had a taste for spaghetti. Solution: cook both.

Sometime before 4 p.m., just as she was finishing dinner preparations, the phone rang.

A social worker was on the other end.

A 12-year-old girl needed a home. Right now.

Lucas stopped what she was doing, gathered five of her daughters into the family SUV and headed to Lutheran Social Services in Southfield to meet and greet the girl.

"That's part of what foster parenting is about," she said later. "You can't always get a day's or two days' notice. You have to be flexible."

Cynthia Lucas, 50, of Southfield is among thousands of women being honored today, Mother's Day. It's a day set aside to pay tribute to the vital role women play as nurturers and caregivers of children.

There are an estimated 80.5 million mothers in America, according to U.S. census figures.

Lucas magnifies the title of mother. In addition to giving birth to two children, she and her husband have adopted five children and been foster parents to 33 - oops, as of Wednesday, make that 34. Alphonse Lucas, 54, also has two adult children from his first marriage.

At 19, Lucas' first full-time job required typing up the case histories of children in foster care. Their cases and faces tugged at her heart, and she pledged that one day she would become a foster mom and adopt children.

Years later, that's exactly what she did.

The Lucases became licensed foster parents in 1991. Convincing her husband to become a foster parent wasn't difficult.

"I'd see these commercials on TV with kids from different places, and they'd ask you to send money to support a child, and I'd always think about it," he said. "But I couldn't bring myself to just send money not knowing if it ever got to the child. This way I know where my money is going."

Their first foster child was a boy, a playmate for their son, Walter, Cynthia Lucas' first child. A steady stream of other children followed, including John Braxton, who they adopted when he was a teenager. He's now a 25-year-old construction worker living in California.

Seven girls live with them now: four adopted daughters, Ranoda, 15, Asia, 13, Africa, 12, and Faith, 7; one biological daughter, Al'ana, 13; a 16-year-old foster daughter who has lived with them for more than a year, and the 12-year-old who arrived Wednesday. The foster children cannot be identified without permission from their parents. Ranoda and Faith are biological sisters, as are Asia and Africa.

Their son, Walter Jackson, 29, of Redford Township and his wife, Lakesha, 28, have two children, adding grandma to Lucas' mothering roles.

### **RULES OF THE LUCAS HOUSE**

No weapons, drugs, drinking, smoking or swearing.

Treat everyone with respect.

Be active in church.

Keep the house and yard neat.

No cell phones after bedtime.

No staying out later than curfew.

Do school work whether you have homework or not.

No TV or radio until all homework is completed.

### **Advice from Mother Lucas**

"Homework is not just the work the teacher sends home. It's work ... you do to prepare for the next day."

"A man can fall down, brush himself off and put on a suit and they'll still call him Mr. But a woman who falls down, no matter how well she dresses, people will still call her something else."

"If people use you, that's OK, as long as you ... learn from it."

### **MEET THE LUCAS FAMILY**

Alphonse Lucas: 54,

Lucas has also inspired friends and family members to adopt or become foster parents.

Camille Martin, a licensing specialist with Lutheran Social Services, who oversees the Lucas cases, said Lucas is a blessing because most foster parents refuse to accept teenagers in their home.

"It's hard to find placement for teenagers," Martin said. "Imagine a house full of teenage girls and all of their issues. She always seems to be able to manage them. She does what she can for each individual."

#### A typical day at home

The weekday gets going early in the Lucases' Southfield home - a modern four-bedroom, 2.5-bath brick home in a new subdivision.

The girls' alarms start going off at 5:30, signaling the two oldest to get up. Cynthia Lucas lies in bed and listens for the sounds of their preparations. She's been awake since 4 a.m., when her husband gets up. He leaves for work about 4:45 a.m.

She could wake the children herself, but she believes an alarm clock helps teach them responsibility and punctuality.

The children get up and ready in shifts. The high schoolers, who need to be on the bus to Southfield-Lathrup at 6:45 a.m., are first. Another alarm sounds at 6 a.m. for the middle schoolers, whose bus picks them up for Birney Middle School at 7:15 a.m. Lucas wakes the youngest, Faith, 7, about 7 a.m. to be ready for her 8 a.m. bus to Stevenson Elementary School.

Occasionally, Lucas prepares a hot breakfast, but experience has taught her it's a waste of time and food.

"I spend more grocery money on breakfast than anything else," she said. "I want them to eat every morning, and I'm not always sure what they will eat on any given morning, so I try to have enough of every kind of breakfast food so they eat something. I hate scrambling eggs and frying bacon only to be told, 'I'm not that hungry.' "

She walks Faith to the bus stop and afterward takes a 30- to 45-minute walk through her subdivision, sometimes venturing to a nearby Dunkin' Donuts for a small hazelnut coffee with cream, no sugar. But she keeps her cell phone with her in case one of the children calls.

And that's exactly what happened during a recent morning's walk.

Ranoda called. She needed the order form and \$52 for a dance costume. Lucas drove to school to see that the order was in by the day's deadline.

Lucas spends most days preparing dinner - she likes to have home-cooked meals on weekdays - cleaning, gardening, visiting her own mom in Detroit or running errands.

The children begin arriving home in shifts about 2:45 p.m., and everyone, including her husband, is usually home for dinner by 4.

As each child arrives home she asks about their day and whether they have homework.

"How'd it go with those spelling words?" she asks Faith, recalling that they'd reviewed 10 words the night before.

"Good," Faith says, smiling brightly as she flops onto a couch in the family room.

After dinner, the children do schoolwork whether they have homework or not.

When they don't have homework, Lucas gives them an assignment - a book or article to read or a review of the day's class work.

"Everybody here reads out loud sometimes," she said. "Too many kids get through school and can't read, and nobody catches it."

'They're all mine'

Parenting is her passion.

When she talks about her children, there are a couple of things Lucas likes to get straight right away.

autoworker, lawn care business owner and minister at Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church.

Cynthia Lucas: 50, full-time mom, former medical researcher, certified elementary school teacher.

Foster daughter: 16, 10th-grader at Southfield-Lathrup. Joined family in January 2005. (Names of foster children cannot be given without permission from parents).

Ranoda: 15, ninth-grader at Southfield-Lathrup. She joined the family nine years ago.

Al'ana: 13, eighth-grader at Birney Middle School. She's a biological child of Cynthia and Alphonse.

Asia: 13, seventh-grader at Birney. She and her biological sister Africa moved in last summer. Africa: 12, sixth-grader at Birney.

Foster daughter: 12, joined the family Wednesday.

Faith: 7, first-grader at Stevenson Elementary. She is Ranoda's biological sister, and joined the family at age 3 months.

Walter Jackson: 29, Cynthia's son from a previous marriage, raised by her and Alphonse. Alphonse also has two sons from his first marriage who didn't live with this family.

John Braxton: 25, adopted son now living in California.

#### WHAT THE CHILDREN SAY ABOUT MOM'S LESSONS

RANODA LUCAS, 15

"The most important lessons she taught me ... to speak up and speak my mind and think

## Cynthia Lucas: Mom to many

First: She and her husband avoid terms like step, biological, foster and adopted. To them, their children are their children. Period.

"One of the things that annoys me most is when someone points to the children and says, 'Now, that one, that one's yours, right?'" she said, speaking with a Southern twang inherited from her parents, natives of Dothan, Ala. "That's a sore spot with us. I say, 'They're all mine.'"

Second: She and her husband don't take in children for the money. They do receive a state subsidy - about \$500 a month per child - but spend far more of their own money in activities, clothing, shoes, nights out and other expenses.

"We just spent \$70 and \$80 for gym shoes," she said. Asia and Africa recently tried out for the school's track team. "Our tab at the beauty shop is \$300, and that does not include my hair and Faith's. And we try to do something with them every weekend. Asia and Africa are about to start piano lessons. Al'ana and Ranoda were taking clarinet and violin lessons until recently. The money that the state gives, it helps you, but if you're committed to seeing that these children live normal, full lives, you are not going to make money."

She estimates their monthly expenses - excluding their mortgage and utilities - at about \$2,200 a month.

A stickler for the rules

Managing a house full of children requires rules and routines, Lucas said.

"We first try to get them to feel comfortable," she said. "Usually, we take them to dinner or someplace fun like Chuck E. Cheese, Jeepers, or another place where they can play and interact with the other children in the home.

"I believe in a parent being a parent, as does my husband, although he's not here as much," she said, explaining that in addition to his full-time job at DaimlerChrysler's Warren Truck Plant, Alphonse Lucas owns and runs a lawn care business, Al's Lawn Service, and is an assistant pastor of the church they attend, Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church on Detroit's west side.

They connect discipline to the child's infraction. "Mainly we withhold privileges," she said. "We might take the cell phone away for a few days. They can't go to a party they want to go to, or to the movies with friends. TV and radio privileges may get taken away."

Ranoda recalled an incident about a year ago when the older girls decided to attend a late movie.

They were enjoying the show when in walked Lucas with security.

"She came to the movie theater with her pajamas on," Ranoda said.

They never saw the movie's end. Afterward, their cell phones were taken and they were confined to the house for several days. "We had to study or listen to her lecture us," Ranoda said.

But Ranoda said she understands why her mother did it and knows she cares.

"She's always giving us little lectures on life," Ranoda said. "She tells us how black kids need to be stronger, how we need to be leaders instead of followers. Sometimes I do think she's too strict, but she tells us we'll appreciate it later in life."

Passing it on

Lucas learned mothering from her own mother.

"My mother didn't take children in, but there were always other children around," she said of Annie Burks, who turned 76 this month. "When I look back on my years growing up, it seems we were always doing something, going here and there. Yet my mother likes to remind me that we were poor."

Lucas' sister, Brenda Buckner, 51, of Detroit said Lucas, the second oldest, was always the mother among the siblings.

"I'm the oldest, but Sister was always the caregiver. There were three girls and two boys, and when the boys would go to acting up, she'd be the one who'd immediately get on their case, which was something because Sister is short. But she didn't care that they were bigger and taller, she'd tell them what to do."

Buckner has adopted four boys because of her sister. "She was always talking about it. She got everybody she could in the family to do it, and then she started getting people outside the family."

for myself, not let anyone else control me."

WALTER JACKSON, 29

"The most important lesson I learned from her is to be confident in myself. And if you say you're going to do something, do it. Your word is pretty much all you have. And that's the kind of person she is."

AL'ANA LUCAS, 13

"I learned that all kids are equal. I'm not better than any of the other kids."

## Q&A ON FOSTER KIDS

QUESTION: How many children are in foster care in Michigan?

ANSWER: 18,564, from infants to age 21. There are about 7,400 licensed homes.

Q: How many are available for adoption?

A: 6,196.

Q: What does the state pay foster parents?

A: Rates are \$14.24 a day for newborns to age 12 and \$17.59 for children 13 to 18. For those 19 to 21, the rate is \$17.59 or \$18.27, depending on a host of factors, including whether the child is still in school or transitioning to independent living.

Q: How can I become a foster parent?

A: Here's how:

Attend orientation.

Apply for licensing.

Pass background checks and provide medical statements for all adults in the home.

Have your house pass inspection by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Provide three acceptable

Lucas said even though she's had success with many children, a few relationships failed, mainly because the children could not or would not abide by the family rules.

"I'm honest when I talk with people about becoming a foster parent. It's not easy. You'll shed some tears. I've had children to lie on me, to steal from me. You can't let it stop you."

She regrets that she had to turn one teenager back after the child repeatedly stayed out late at night.

"I hate saying no," she said. "But part of my job is to protect these children. I can't protect them if they're not here. And I had other teenagers here watching what was going on."

Still, she speaks with conviction about the importance of opening doors to give children a home.

"So many of our children out there are in need of a home. And I'm not stuck on black. I've had white kids living here. But I do feel we, African Americans, should do a better job of taking care of our own. We know how important the extended family has been throughout our history."

Al'ana would be living the life of an only child without her sisters.

She likes their company.

"You can always get one of them to play with you or talk about what's happening," she said. "I would get lonely if it was just me."

Lucas also says that when her children see her taking in other children, it teaches them firsthand the importance of sharing and giving.

"The children learn to play and socialize with all kinds of children. They learn that the world does not revolve around them," she said.

"I've always believed that if I bless other children, mine will be blessed."

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references.

Pass visits to the home by the licensing worker.

Attend training.

q. What are the qualifications?

A: You must be 18 or older, have good moral character and adequate space and be able to support yourself.

Q: Is there a Web site for more information?

A: Yes. Go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs) or the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange at [www.mare.org.cq](http://www.mare.org.cq).

Source: Michigan Department of Human Services

## **CELEBRATING MOMS**

80.5 million mothers are in the United States.

55% of U.S. women are moms.

2 is the average number of kids that today's women are likely to have.

7 out of 10 moms held paying jobs, in or out of the home, in 2005, the most recent figures available.

150 million Mother's Day cards will be given this year.

25.2 years is the average age of women when they give birth the first time, a record high in U.S. record-keeping.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics



## Siblings were moved often, need gentle transition

Sunday, December 17, 2006

By Arn Shackelford

The Grand Rapids Press

Editor's note: This is another in a series of articles about special-need children available for adoption.

Ten-year-old Jasmine and her brother, Isaiah, 8, were removed from their birth home about two years ago because of severe abuse and neglect and have lived in several foster homes.

Each move, they hoped, would be the last. Each family, they prayed, would want to keep them. But even a relative turned down a chance to adopt them.

Now, their caseworker says, any move must be made slowly.

"Any transition in their lives, hopefully into an adoptive home, must be done gently. These kids have just been through too much."

The worker says he's amazed the children are doing as well as they are -- liking school and not exhibiting behavioral problems in the classroom.

Jasmine, in the fifth grade, is a bright girl, outgoing and "fairly mellow," according to the worker. She makes friends easily and enjoys playing board games and cards with them, along with a little girl-talking.

Jasmine also enjoys music and books but needs to be encouraged to be more active, especially outdoors, rather than watch television.

Although the siblings' early years were in a chaotic environment, they have benefited from the stability and routine of foster care, despite the moves, the worker said.

Both attend church regularly and continue to see or talk on the phone with five other siblings living elsewhere.

They are emotionally needy, however, and that shows up in Jasmine's immaturity and her brother's attempts at being the class clown to get attention.

In the third grade, Isaiah loves school -- especially the social aspect -- but sometimes struggles with his studies.

His teacher calls him "a sweet boy" but says he needs to focus more.

"Here's where their adoptive parents can really help, staying in touch with the school and motivating the youngsters to always do their best," the worker said.

"I'm sure once they're in a stable home -- someplace they can call home -- they'll become more emotionally grounded. I'm surprised these kids aren't aggressive or more damaged than they are, with what they've been through."

The worker is looking for a two-parent home in which the parents are knowledgeable of or experienced with emotionally needy kids. The parents must be people "who understand these kids and know they need the

security of 'home-sweet-home'," he said.

Jasmine and Isaiah want to stay in touch with their siblings and likely will need to continue in therapy sessions after they're adopted.

If yours is the right family for two special children, if you can open your home -- and your heart -- to Jasmine and Isaiah, call Diana DiTrapani, Muskegon Catholic Social Services, (231) 726-4735, or write to DiTrapani at 1095 Third St., Suite 125, Muskegon, MI 49441.

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Published December 17, 2006

## Eaton County gets plan for ending homelessness

By KURT MADDEN  
Lansing Community Newspapers

EATON COUNTY — Chris was kicked out of her boyfriend's house and had no place to live.

She found an apartment she could afford but could not obtain money from the Department of Human Services for a security deposit because she was sleeping on a friend's couch and was not in a shelter.

When she was finally admitted to a shelter several days later, she learned the landlord rented the apartment to someone else because so much time had passed.

Chris then left the shelter but discovered she could no longer sleep on her friend's couch.

These scenarios are played out repeatedly for people who live on the edge of poverty and suddenly find themselves without a roof over their head, according to a 13-page report submitted to the Eaton County Board of Commissioners.

The report is part of an ambitious effort — called Housing First — to end homelessness within ten years, not only in Eaton County, but throughout the state, said Jonathan Greene, economic development and housing coordinator.

"First, community awareness is necessary to create community will," Greene said.

The report says that a shift in culture is needed: From accepting homelessness as something that will always exist to assuming permanent housing is a right for every person.

Greene said the challenge is daunting because of the unique issues often found among the homeless. Sometimes bad personal decisions are the main cause for homelessness.

"Some homeless people are tough to love," Greene said.

Key findings of the report are:

- Many of the homeless can't find jobs because of a lack of education or a criminal history; the average homeless person has a tenth-grade education and 10 percent of those have a felony on their record
- In three Eaton County communities, 51 percent or more of the population is considered low income.
- The SIREN/Eaton Shelter provided 8,000 emergency overnight stays from Dec. 1,

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Article published Dec 18, 2006

## **\$300,000 to boost aid to homeless**

With \$300,000 granted from the state, the Monroe County Network on Homelessness will be able to help about 20 additional homeless families in the coming years. The two-year grant is provided through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to provide assistance specifically to families with children.

Stephanie Kasprzak, director of the Monroe County Opportunity Program, one of the administrative agencies involved in Monroe, said the grant should make a major impact on the homeless population throughout the area.

"The money will go toward housing 20 homeless families," said Ms. Kasprzak. "That's in addition to the 13 families we are helping through the current grants. We have approximately 87 homeless people in Monroe County, so this would significantly reduce the population. We'll be able to service a large chunk."

Ms. Kasprzak said the definition of homeless in this grant is more lenient than other grants, which also helps the dollars reach into the community further.

"It covers a larger scope of people," she said. "It can be people in public emergency shelters, those living in tents in the state parks, those living in their cars, couch surfers who have a roof over their heads, just not their own roofs, those living in hotels."

Collaboration between different human services agencies in Monroe, those that make up the network, resulted in a drafted plan to effectively address homelessness in the county within the next 10 years. The state dollars allow the Monroe County Network on Homelessness to begin following its plan.

Monroe County has had a network to scrutinize homelessness since 1985. Within the last year the state called for all counties in Michigan to draft plans on how to put an end to homelessness. In October, the state hosted the Michigan Homeless summit where all of the communities came together to submit those plans, unveiling 60 community commitments to end homelessness covering 100 percent of Michigan's 83 counties.

According to MSHDA, Michigan now stands as the only state in the country where all communities are committed to end homelessness. It was at that summit that MSHDA announced \$14 million in grants was available statewide to help jumpstart the 10-year plans.

The Monroe plan, and others across the state, point to a housing first method, meaning that providing housing for homeless people at low cost along with a supportive financial net for a particular period is more effective and less expensive than other methods when trying to keep people off the streets.

"The thrust of the whole housing first campaign that has gained prominence at the state and national level is moving families into housing as fast as possible," said Joe Grifka, chairperson of the Network on Homelessness. "Research has shown that there is very little, if any, benefit to a family spending time in a shelter. There has been a big change in thinking, and this is one of the first expressions of that."

The administrators of the grant will identify housing and work with local renting agencies to secure homes.

"What goes along with that is case management," said Ms. Kasprzak. "The overall idea is to get the people self-sufficient enough to pay rent. We start with 70 percent and they pay 30 percent and as we go through a two-year period that adjusts as it can be adjusted. Of course there are some people who are chronically homeless who will never be able to take on that full expense."

Ms. Kasprzak said those people are usually mentally ill people who are unable to work and live on Social Security or other subsidies. However, she said, if someone receives \$600 a month to live off of, he or she usually has trouble making it work.

This \$300,000 will be focused on helping families with children. For example, a family with one person working on minimum wage is often right on or below the poverty line. The money they make is not enough to support the family. The grant would allow MCOP to provide additional dollars for rent while other members of the network helped in other areas. If that minimum-wage worker is underemployed, working a job below his or her skills and experience, then Michigan Works would help find suitable employment or offer educational opportunities.

"But that immediate need is getting and keeping a roof over their heads," said Ms. Kasprzak. "That's what this will allow us to

do for more people."

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Groups get \$1.45M for affordable housing

Saturday, December 16, 2006

By Kathy Jessup

[kjessup@kalamazoogazette.com](mailto:kjessup@kalamazoogazette.com) 388-8590

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority awarded \$1.45 million Wednesday to a collaborative of local agencies to tackle affordable housing, much of it directed to Kalamazoo County.

A \$500,000 state grant will be administered by Housing Resources Inc. to assist homeless families. The Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission will get \$500,000 to help the chronically homeless afford rental housing, and \$450,000 will go to Catholic Family Services to assist homeless youths younger than 17 in a nine-county region, including Kalamazoo and surrounding counties.

The grant comes at a time when the Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network is asking Kalamazoo city commissioners to find \$250,000 in 2007 or 2008 to "match" the quarter-million the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners appropriated Dec. 5. At that time, county commissioners indicated they would bring their contribution to \$500,000 if the city of Kalamazoo also upped its contribution.

The city took the lead in the effort several years ago, pledging \$250,000 to establish a local housing trust fund if other partners would match the money.

Until this year, the match had not been forthcoming.

Local governmental and human-services officials claim the city of Kalamazoo has become a focal location for low-income people who lack housing. All of Kalamazoo County's housing shelters are located in the city, they said, adding that the city also collects no property tax revenue from those nonprofit agencies.

Kalamazoo City Commissioner Mary Balkema said Friday homelessness is more than a city problem and indicated she plans to meet with Kalamazoo County's township supervisors in January "to talk about what the whole community can do to address this problem."

Reaction from city commissioners leaving Friday's Committee of the Whole meeting indicated it's unlikely the housing initiative will get additional money from Kalamazoo's 2007 budget. However, some members said they might support a future supplement to the \$250,000 the commission is expected to officially release to the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission Monday night.

"There's not money in the existing (2007) budget for it without hurting others who are served by the city," Commissioner Don Cooney said. "But I think we can look at our (federal Community Development Block) grant funds and try to come up with something in the future. It has to be done without cutting essential needs though."

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Article published Dec 18, 2006

## Event helps combat domestic violence

*There's a lot of great news taking place in Livingston County these days, and we'd like to take time today to spotlight some of it.*

Tuesday's "Deck the Halls" fundraiser was a huge success for LACASA. The black-tie affair that has become a staple of Livingston County's holiday season raised \$29,000 to help combat domestic violence in our community.

More than 210 people attended the event at the Genoa Township home of Steve and Patty Gronow, who decided to open their doors to the event after attending last year's "Deck the Halls" fundraiser and touring LACASA's facility. We appreciate their hospitality.

We also congratulate LACASA on its successful fund-raiser to help provide shelter and services for the survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. The work the organization does is vitally important to our community, especially our youngsters.

### Shop with a cop until you drop

Hats off to the county's law enforcement community for the annual Shop With a Cop program that allowed more than 100 kids to shop for Christmas presents at Wal-Mart. The program pairs police officers with underprivileged children in the community.

This year, officers and employees of the Livingston County Sheriff's Department, as well as the Brighton post of the Michigan State Police and the police departments of Fowlerville, Hamburg Township, Pinckney, Unadilla Township, Howell, Brighton and Green Oak Township and the Metroparks Police Department worked with the Department of Human Services and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Livingston County to ID kids for the program.

Through the generosity of community sponsors—including Wal-Mart and Pepsi, which contributed funding—each kid got \$125 to spend.

As well as helping make Christmas enjoyable for needy children, the program also lets the kids and the cops get to know each other in a relaxed, fun atmosphere.

### Santa shuffling for needy

More than 600 students put on their comfortable shoes and completed the annual one-mile Santa Shuffle that raised a record of nearly \$4,000 for needy county families. In order to participate in the event, walkers had to be sponsored for at least the minimum donation of \$2.

All the money raised helps purchase Christmas gifts and household necessities for needy county families, according to Lorin Olschanski, Highlander Way's student council adviser who helps coordinate the walk.

Hats off to all who participated in the event.

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Published December 18, 2006

## Suspect in Delhi shooting gives up

Police: Friends urged Lansing man to surrender

By Kevin Grasha  
Lansing State Journal

### What's next

- Jeffrey Scott Husband, 20, who authorities say shot and killed his girlfriend, is expected to be arraigned today in 55th District Court.

MASON - The 20-year-old Lansing man suspected of killing his girlfriend, who authorities had been seeking since Friday, turned himself in Sunday.

Friends convinced Jeffrey Scott Husband to surrender, Ingham County sheriff's Sgt. Tim O'Neill said. Husband showed up at the Ingham County Sheriff's Office just before noon.

Vanessa Kay Pruitt, 18, was shot and killed at about 4:30 a.m. Friday in her Delhi Township apartment at 2445 N. Aurelius Road.

Police said Husband, who is the father of Pruitt's 2-year-old son, also shot Pruitt's 24-year-old sister, Latisha Cole. She suffered minor injuries and is expected to recover.

Husband is expected to be arraigned today. He is being held at the Ingham County Jail. A message left for him at the jail was not returned.

The South Square apartment complex, where Pruitt lived, is just south of Lansing, down the street from another apartment building where a man was shot to death Aug. 6 in a drug-related robbery. It is also near the Cedar Heights neighborhood, where a man was shot and wounded Aug. 16.

On Sunday, life had mostly returned to normal at the complex, which has about 10 buildings.

Rick Taylor, 53, who lives in a building near where Pruitt was killed, said he was shocked by the shooting. But he is not thinking about moving. "It could happen anywhere," said Taylor, who has lived at the complex for nine uneventful years. "This is just a freak thing. That's the way I'm going to look at it."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or [kgrasha@lsj.com](mailto:kgrasha@lsj.com).

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Published December 18, 2006

## Monday update: Highfields gains state license again

Program given new name after reports of abuse

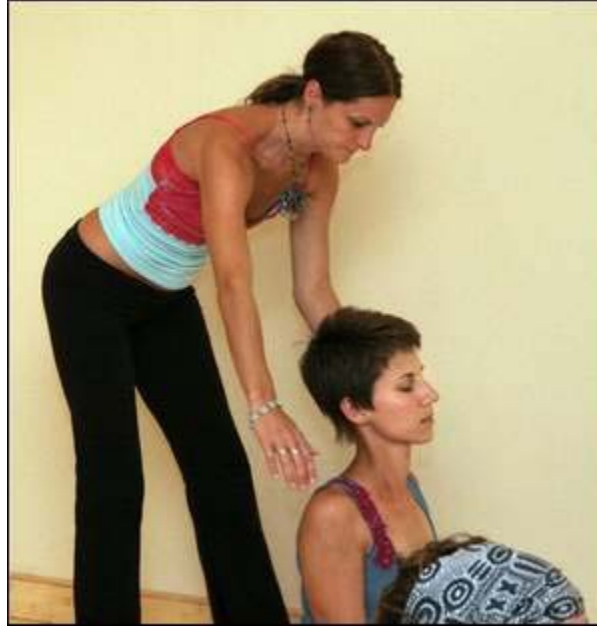
Lansing State Journal

ONONDAGA - The Michigan Department of Human Services recently restored full-license status to Highfields Inc., the family and children's services agency that ran into trouble earlier this year.

The state and Ingham County judges pulled 33 youths from Highfields' Onondaga-based residential program for juvenile offenders in February. Their actions were based on reports of staff physically abusing boys.

"I'm comfortable with the new leadership, their vision and how they are proceeding," said Leonard Dixon, director of the MDHS' Bureau of Juvenile Justice.

Highfields' license for the care of 12- to 17-year-old males will extend into November 2008.



(Photo by Lansing State Journal file photo)  
Fundamentals: Yoga instructor Hilaire Lockwood (left) at her yoga studios in Haslett, shown in 2005, has released her first DVD, called "The Fundamentals of Power Yoga."

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The residential program has a new name, "Phoenix Program: Students Overcoming Adversity." According to Highfields officials, three of the four houses are full and operational.

Highfields' board of directors removed the nonprofit agency's past president and chief executive officer, fired some staff and devised new training programs for workers.

The board also appointed John Evans as the new president and CEO to oversee 17 Highfields programs serving families and youth in 11 counties. He is a former MDHS division director.

"Our staff has worked hard to get to this point," said Brian Philson, Highfields' residential services director.

**Local yoga teacher releases her 1st DVD**

After years of detours and crises, Hilaire Lockwood has a starring role again.

It's a different genre, though: "The Fundamentals of Power Yoga" is her first DVD.

"I wasn't aware of the camera at all," said Lockwood, 35. "I was a teacher who forgot she was ever an actor."

As a teenager, Lockwood starred in musicals at East Lansing High School and in a summer production of "Romeo and Juliet." She went on to study and act in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Then came tragedies. There were the deaths of her stepfather (noted screenwriter Jim Cash) and her brother. There was her own cancer, including four throat surgeries.

"I had a bit of a setback (this year), with a recurrence in the chest area," Lockwood said. "I went down to see my doctor in Texas."

The verdict: "They said, 'We may never be able to say you don't have cancer, but it's very minute.' "

She takes the positive view: "Yoga brings you in a spiritual space, to let go of your concerns."

Lockwood began yoga at 18.

"The fact that I've been upside-down every day for (17) years, I'm sure, has helped me fight the cancer."

She returned home four years ago, and, with her husband Brian Oday, created a warm-looking studio at 1476 Haslett Road. Hilltop Yoga ([www.hilltopyoga.com](http://www.hilltopyoga.com)) has 10 part-time instructors; now it has its first DVD, covering all levels.

The surgery has cost Lockwood one of her vocal cords and has limited a voice that once reached five octaves. She said she still sings to her children (ages 5 and 3) and to her husband.

"He is my constant inspiration and encouragement," she said. "I would have never done this DVD if it weren't for him."

### **Lighthouse bill ready for president's signature**

WASHINGTON - The federal government will help preserve dozens of historic but deteriorating lighthouses that dot the shores of the Great Lakes in Michigan under a bill awaiting the president's signature.

The legislation, backed by both Michigan senators and a bipartisan group of 12 of its representatives, passed the Senate in September and the House earlier this month. President Bush is expected to sign it into law within the next week.

"The 120 lighthouses that line our state's shores create a landscape that is unique to Michigan, drawing thousands of tourists to experience their beauty and history each year," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Lansing Democrat.

She and Rep. Dave Camp, R-Midland, were lead sponsors of the bill.

Michigan has 3,288 miles of shoreline and more lighthouses than any other state in the continental United States.

The legislation gives the National Park Service three years to:

- Assess the condition of the state's lighthouses and estimate the cost of preserving them.

- Recommend how to link the lighthouses, plus Michigan's shipwreck sites and maritime museums, in a way that attracts visitors.
- Identify sources of funding for repairs to the lighthouses.

Since the mid-1990s, the Coast Guard has been transferring ownership of lighthouses to state and municipal governments and nonprofit groups, many of which don't have the money for needed repairs.

Staff writers Susan Vela, Mike Hughes and correspondent Katherine Hutt Scott contributed to this report. Is there a local story you'd like to see revisited? Please call (517) 267-1300 or e-mail [metro@lsj.com](mailto:metro@lsj.com).

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12/17/2006

## Forum

# Parental rights and the American justice system

BY WILLIAM C. WHITBECK

When I came on the Michigan Court of Appeals about nine years ago, I did not know that the state could initiate a proceeding to terminate a parent's rights to that parent's children. When termination cases began to cross my desk, I was wary. After all, the family unit is the building block of much of our concept of a civilized society. To terminate a parent's rights — essentially to break that unit apart by judicial fiat — is a daunting prospect for someone with even mildly libertarian tendencies.

My view has changed. In a significant number of the termination cases that I see on appeal, the question is not whether we should uphold the trial court's termination of the parent's rights. Given the evidence of physical and sexual abuse, of prolonged incarceration for criminal offenses, of substance abuse, or of pervasive neglect, termination is usually the only option. The real question is: What took so long?

The answer is complex. First, perhaps because we are so innately cautious about breaking families apart, we have boxed in the termination procedure with a devilishly detailed set of due process restrictions. Meeting follows meeting, hearing follows hearing and the clock ticks on. Failures mount, and the abuse continues.

Secondly, overlaid on these restrictions is the American belief that there is no problem without a solution. Thus, there are a number of heartbreakingly sincere referrals of the abusive parent to parenting classes, to anger management sessions, to substance abuse counseling, to various types of therapy — and still the abuse continues.

There is a belief that if only we could find the right program, then all would be well. But when I see the cold record, I am reminded of a stylized kabuki dance, with a pre-ordained outcome. The hard truth is that there is no right program and the ultimate and inevitable result of the system's well-intentioned efforts will be failure and tragedy.

If this is so, then I suggest that we need to reevaluate our approach. The primary background of those who are involved in children's protective services is in social work. But at the point that there is criminal abuse and neglect, much of the social worker's training becomes irrelevant.

The skills that are paramount are investigative and legal in nature: The task at hand is to document the abuse and then to take immediate, effective action to protect the child.

If we accept that we are, when dealing with the abuse and neglect of children, in the law enforcement arena, then why not take the next step? If we intend to hire additional investigators and managers at the state level, why not hire the real thing: police officers, either current or retired?

Certainly the entrenched social worker bureaucracy will react in horror. Certainly the compassion lobby will

throw a hissy fit. But fewer children will suffer and die while we fiddle with a system that all too often fails because it has failed to identify its basic function.

**About the author:**

William C. Whitbeck is Chief Justice of the Michigan Court of Appeals.

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Article published Dec 16, 2006

## Monroe County awarded childhood education grant

Monroe County now has a \$160,000 grant to help figure out how to give pre-schoolers the best start in life.

Officials with the Monroe County Great Start Collaborative, a coalition of agencies working to help children from birth to age 5, accepted the money during a Friday afternoon ceremony at the Monroe County Intermediate School District before an audience that was crawling with toddlers.

"We're here today to specifically invest dollars in these children," said state Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, as the flock of youngsters before her frolicked, babbled, giggled and cried.

The dollars will be used to pay for planning and assessment services, meaning officials will try to pinpoint the kinds of programs it needs to help families and their little ones get a jump-start on education.

Nancy Thompson, the county's Great Start Collaborative coordinator, said she hoped the county would see the results of the planning effort within a year.

The grant was part of \$3.15 million the Early Childhood Investment Corp. awarded to 21 such collaboratives around the state. The ECIC, launched in 2005 by the Granholm administration, is a public, nonprofit corporation that invests in programs for youngsters using grants from a mix of public and private sources.

"We put our money into communities that we thought were best suited to do the job," explained Michael Foley, ECIC chief operating officer.

Donald Spencer, Monroe County Intermediate School District superintendent, reminded those attending the grant award ceremony that 85 percent of brain development occurs before children enter kindergarten. He said good pre-school education has been shown to increase a child's social responsibility, earnings and economic status, educational performance and test scores.

He said the county collaborative has been working on early education for about six years and has found that "our greatest need as a community is to make early child care education available to parents, their children and day care providers."

The Great Start collaboratives are an investment in the future, said Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services and ECIC board member.

"Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high-school graduation rates," she said. "improving the skills of a large fraction of the work force, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

Michael Foley, ECIC chief operating officer, said Monroe County got one of the larger grants given to the various collaboratives.

"We put our money into communities that we thought were best suited to do the job," he said.

"I'm impressed with the amount of commitment you have in this community to early childhood education," he said.

He said the ECIC has a three-year commitment to communities who applied for the grants. The Legislature approved \$1 million for collaboratives around the state and that appropriation was matched by money from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The DHS also provided funding.

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## Michigan Report

December 15, 2006

### **WELFARE CASELOADS DIP IN NOVEMBER**

Families receiving cash assistance from the state dropped in November after six months of increases, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 87,197 cases last month, down from 88,133 cases in October, a recent high. The cases represented 236,137 people, also down from 238,964 people in October.

But the Food Assistance Program continued a climb that has lasted more than a year. November had 545,158 cases representing 1.19 million people, a caseload increase of .3 percent from October, making it the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive month of growth.

Childcare cases also climbed again in November, with 60,626 cases representing 114,494 children. October saw 59,664 cases representing 112,853 children, which had been a second month of decline.

The number of people required to work reporting income held at 30 percent after being at 32 percent in August and September. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit also held at 10 percent after falling from near 13 percent, a level maintained since October 2005, in September.



## Social Workers Face Tough Task

Reporter: John Tramontana

Email Address: [john.tramontana@wilx.com](mailto:john.tramontana@wilx.com)

It's not your typical nine to five. Social work has long hours, and big responsibilities.

"When people are in trouble, that's when a social worker will be involved," said MSU School of Social Work Director Gary Anderson.

Often times, the decisions social workers make could have life-altering consequences, as in the case of Ricky Holland. ☐

"This tragic case underscores the tough challenges we face everyday working with troubled families and children," said DHS director Marianna Udow in a press conference on Friday. "it is difficult, heartbreaking work."

Work that keeps increasing for an under-staffed work force. There are only about 16 hundred child welfare workers across the state handling more than 70 thousand investigations annually. But those challenges aren't deterring some from entering the field.

"The reason you go into this profession is because you want to help people." Anderson said.

Anderson says the profession can be rewarding and that's what he tries to convey to his students.

"There's also the aspect when you have the chance to do something that's meaningful, has worth, has an impact."

And that's what's kept LaTonya Jones in the field for more than four years. In that time she's seen her share of stressful cases.

There are a lot of things you can take home that prevent you from going to sleep at night. you do cry," Jones said. "I can't even go into words how heartbreaking things are that we see."

But Jones, like so many others, will keep working, hoping to make a difference in the life of a child.

### Find this article at:

<http://www.wilx.com/fox47news/headlines/4868036.html>

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The Michigan Citizen

December 18, 2006

## **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization Call to action!**

### **SPRING OFFENSIVE/2007**

State of the Community

Dear Colleagues:

As we approach the end of the year, we should reflect on where we stand today, and ask that obligatory question, "Are we better off today than we were last year?" If we are still on this side of the living, the answer is "NO"!

The country is in turmoil from coast to coast. Pockets of poverty have now turned into regions under the watch of these mean-spirited Republicans and their liberal sounding Democratic friends.

The national press is careful to select what areas they find to highlight when it comes to the rising, invisible economic climate reports they feed us on the nightly news.

People are poor, are hungry, are unemployed, are afraid, and are aware that the world as we know it has changed.

We are not confused, and we understand that if you are a working person, your "stuff" is in trouble.

In Michigan, along with Hurricane Katrina states, we are hardest hit, so we have seen the misery up close and personal for a longer stretch than others, but the nightmare of economic pain is coming to visit us all.

For the first time in decades, we have fulltime workers with no benefits!

We have fulltime workers in shelters.

We have seniors dying before their time, cut down early by the stress of being threatened with impending poverty because their pensions and fixed incomes can't cover the rising costs of living.

We have babies finding loaded guns that accidentally go off, killing or wounding one or more.

We have street crimes being committed by mis-guided persons who act more like savages than our neighbors.

In Detroit, we have 25,000 public school students who have no healthcare coverage today. We have unprecedented poverty worldwide, and even America has not been spared.

US News and World Report writes that 2 percent of the total world population OWNS 55 percent of the world's resources. Scandalous!

Practically everything we know is under attack and there are few voices raised to demand a change. We are either going to live as free people in this country, with access to all the implements of survival regardless of the ability to pay, or NO ONE can live free and contented. Let's work for a change.

To that end, Michigan Welfare Rights is issuing a "Call to Action."

For the spring of 2007, we must be ready to emerge from another harsh winter, organized for change. Most critical to the survival of thousands is access to free and clean drinking water, a requirement for life.

The Water Affordability Plan has been mired in bureaucratic madness since it was submitted for review and passage by the Detroit City Council. The Water Dept. administration has hi-jacked the Plan by various treacherous methods, and cannot get on the same page with the rest of the city as they question this sentence this week, and another sentence the next week.

Endless memo's and empty correspondences have been issued and responded to week after week while the Department continues its diabolical pattern of cutting water off at thousands of homes, month after month.

Many of our fellow community neighbors will not survive this winter.

Death by poverty is not a new phenomenon where our lives are concerned, and we are all too complacent as we see what is certain to occur again and again. A fire will take the lives of some children and some seniors who were using alternate ways to heat themselves after their utilities were turned off.

Right after the news reports on the losses sustained, they will go on to report the sports outcomes as if our lives and our deaths mean nothing.

Some argument will develop because we are too poor to pay for something, and another person or persons will lose a life.

Domestic abuse will rise, elder abuse will occur, hearts will give out, strokes will be

commonplace, and no one will see the connection between our poverty, our suffering, our sicknesses, and our early demise.

Welfare Rights will organize the community toward enrollment into the Water Affordability Plan so we can stop water shut offs.

The second part of the “Call to Action” involves the other great crisis we suffer, which is the rising homelessness in our region.

What sense does it make to have 14,000 homeless people in our area, and 44,000 vacant properties also standing, many of which are livable, owned by the State of Michigan?

We are proposing direct action of both these fronts...we will be organizing efforts to move homeless people into these properties, and will also organize the escrow accounts to pay for our occupancy.

We need carpenters to help restore these homes. We need plumbers to help restore these homes. We need seniors to help sew curtains and bake casseroles to help feed these families when they first move in.

We need lawyers to help get Welfare Rights members out of jail when we defy the banks and move our people inside. We need Judges to release us. We need Police Officers to refuse to arrest us. We need students to ring the properties and help kick in doors. We need locksmiths to help us install new locks on these doors.

We need organized homeless providers to get on this page and work to end this scandalous condition.

We need the clergy who truly believe in a higher power, to forsake the safety of their warm, inside pulpits to be the barrier in front of us when the forces of evil come to bring us pain.

In closing, let us remember the words Jack uttered in the movie, Titanic.

Remember, when he looked at the situation and saw that the ship was about to sink, he stood on the forward ledge as it rose, ready to plunge into the sea, he screamed, “Alright Rose, this is it”!!

This is it.

We organize to save our community, our people, our city, our state and our country, or we stand watch as slow and consuming death picks us off, one by one.

Let the courageous and the spiritual among us step forward and prepare for change.

Stand with us, and let us not fall for systematic suffering not another damned moment!

*Maureen D. Taylor, State Chair  
Michigan Welfare Rights Org.*